

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5465

INFO AMCONSUL MELBOURNE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 2237

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: AS, VS, PINT, PFOR, VN

SUBJECT: PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE ON INDOCHINA CONTINUES

1. SUMMARY. ON APRIL 9 THE AUSTRALIAN SENATE PASSED OPPOSITION MOTION ACCUSING THE WHITLAM GOVERNMENT OF DUPLICITY OVER VIETNAM. THE MOTION SAID THAT THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT HAD TACITLY APPROVED THE INVASION OF SOUTH VIETNAM BY NORTH VIETNAM. END SUMMARY

2. THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE ON VIETNAM WHICH WAS INITIATED IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ON APRIL 8 MOVED TO THE SENATE ON APRIL 9 WHEN THE OPPOSITION RESOLUTION CITED ABOVE WAS PASSED BY A STRAIGHT PARTY VOTE OF 27 TO 25. TWO INDEPENDENT SENATORS (STEELE HALL AND CLEAVER BUNTON) DID NOT VOTE.

3. THE OPPOSITION MOVED THE MOTION BECAUSE IT BELIEVES THAT THE WHITLAM GOVERNMENT SENT SIMILAR CABLES TO NORTH AND SOUTH VIETNAM WHICH INDICATED A CLEAR BIAS IN FAVOR OF NORTH VIETNAM. THE CABLES TO SAIGON ALLEGEDLY CONCERNED THE VIOLATIONS OF THE CEASEFIRE, SAID THAT THE PARIS PEACE ACCORDS SHOULD BE IMPLEMENTED AND REQUIRED THE AUSTRALIAN EMBASSY TO INFORM THE THIEU GOVERNMENT OF AUSTRALIA'S CALL FOR A NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR RECONCILIATION. THE CABLE TO
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HANOI REPORTEDLY MADE SIMILAR POINTS BUT INDICATED THAT

AUSTRALIA UNDERSTOOD AND APPRECIATED HANOI'S POSITION. SENATOR WITHERS, THE LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION IN THE SENATE, SAID QTE WHILE OSTENSIBLE CALLING ON BOTH SIDES TO AGREE TO PEACE, IT (THE GOVERNMENT) IS PRIVATELY GIVING SUCCOR AND PHYSICAL SUSTENANCE TO THE NORTH VIETNAMESE. END QTE

4. SENATOR WITHERS ALSO SAID THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD ALSO CALL ON THE GOVERNMENTS OF NORTH VIETNAM, RUSSIA AND CHINA TO STOP THEIR DESTRUCTION OF SOUTH VIETNAM IN THE SAME WAY IT HAD PUBLICLY CALLED ON THE UNITED STATES TO HALT ITS INTERVENTION.

5. IN CONVERSATION WITH EMBOFF ON 10 APRIL MHR ANDREW PEACOCK, THE SHADOW FOREIGN MINISTER, SAID THAT HE HAD APPROACHED WHITLAM ON THE EVENING OF APRIL 8 AND TOLD HIM THAT WHITLAM'S REFUSAL TO LET OPPOSITION LEADER FRASER READ THE CABLES IN QUESTION WAS A SERIOUS POLITICAL ERROR. PEACOCK HAD TOLD WHITLAM THE OPPOSITION WOULD NOT PRESS THE ISSUE FURTHER IF IT COULD BE SHOWN THAT THE CABLES TO HANOI AND SAIGON WERE IDENTICAL. WHITLAM REFUSED TO DO SO, WHICH DID NOT SURPRISE PEACOCK, WHO TOLD EMBOFF THAT HE HAD READ BOTH THE CABLES. PEACOCK THEN REVIEWED THE MATTER WITH OPPOSITION SENATE LEADER WITHERS, WHO MOVED THE CENSURE MOTION IN THE SENATE ON APRIL 9. PEACOCK ALSO SAID THAT WITHIN MINUTES AFTER THE OPPOSITION RAISED THE QUESTION OF THE CABLES IN PARLIAMENT DFA SECRETARY RENOUF HAD COLLECTED ALL THE COPIES OF THE TELS IN CANBERRA AND LOCKED THEM IN HIS OFFICE SAFE.

6. COMMENT: DEBATE ON INDOCHINA IS BECOMING MORE HEATED IN BOTH HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT AND THE REFUSAL OF THE PRIME MINISTER TO PRODUCE THE TWO CABLES IN QUESTION IS BEGINNING TO HURT HIM POLITICALLY.
GREEN

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